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ABSTRACT

The project, "Community-Based Learning Centers for Older Adults," studied the nature of the older adult teacher and his/her motivations and perceptions of the experience. Data were collected during in-depth interviews with 23 older adults who had taught in a community-based learning center. Interviewee comments were treated as incidents and coded according to properties indicated. Properties precipitated categories representing conceptual elements. Relationships between categories suggested potential hypotheses, including (1) willingness to share skills or knowledge will be perceived as having no direct correlation to formal education training and teaching experience; (2) the more extensive a person's reported history of community participation, the more likely she/he will be to teach; (3) a decision to teach based on altruism and peer orientation will be perceived as a reason to teach more often by older adults with less education and teaching experience; (4) transmission of knowledge will be seen as a reason to teach more often by older adults with formal education training and teaching experience; (5) fellowship and self-actualization will be perceived as benefits by more teachers in an age-segregated rather than age-integrated setting; and (6) teachers in age-segregated settings will view their educating roles as helper or friend more often. (YLB)

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THE OLDER ADULT AS TEACHER

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INTRODUCTION

Even though more and more older adults are involved in lifelong learning, interested in continuing their education, and taking classes and courses, very little has been done to make educational activities convenient and accessible to them. Colleges and universities are offering free or reduced tuition to older adults who want to audit classes, but few go to the campus. Many community agencies offer classes, but their offerings are not coordinated or planned so that a wide variety of classes are available to interested older people.

One solution is to bring a variety of classes and courses into one community facility, a place where older adults can come to learn many things--where they are comfortable and where they can have a chance to develop and teach their own courses. This is the learning center concept, one that says that educational opportunities should be brought to people in their own communities in response to the needs and interests of the residents.

In October of 1978, the Faye McBeath Institute on Aging and Adult Life at the University of Wisconsin-Madison applied for and received a grant from the Administration on Aging to conduct a research and demonstration program on "Community-Based Learning Centers for Older Adults." The purpose of this project was to study the process of how communities can utilize their own resources to provide educational programs to older adults, and to determine the value of these programs for older adults. In order to document that process, the Institute on Aging provided seed money to three Dane County communities to assist them in developing Learning Centers. A local agency or organization in each community was selected to sponsor the Learning Center, and staff coordinators were appointed. Each Learning Center also had a planning committee composed of older adults and community leaders. The project design consisted of six months of planning, a domonstration period of one year, and six months of research and evaluation.

The results of this research and demonstration project are documented in four publications. "Developing Community-Based Learning Centers for Older Adults" is a technical assistance manual which describes the steps involved in establishing a learning center, and provides suggestions for communities and groups of older adults. The second publication describes the evaluation of the model project and the third reports on the research conducted with older adult learners. The fourth publication is this study on older adults as teachers, A monograph entitled Education and the Older Adult will be published by the Institute on Aging late in 1982.

O V E R V I E W

Today, more than ever, the necessity of lifelong learning is being acknowledged. In a society where change is occurring at an increasingly fast rate, the ability to cope with its inherent effects must also increase. Education, as a means for coping with these changes, has become a lifelong necessity. The basic years of schooling as a child and young adult no longer provide the skills and training needed throughout one's life. Older adults, in particular, often face double conditions of change. Not only is the society around them rapidly changing, but they also experience accelerated changes within their own lives--health concerns, retirement, monetary adjustments, and often, new living situations. Education for older adults has been proposed as a means for adapting to and conditioning change, and the multitude of programs that have emerged in the last several years point to its potential (Academy for Education Development, 1974; Kauffman and Luby, 1974; Mason, 1974). In many of these programs, older adults assume the educating role. Through a variety of informal and formal teaching roles, the knowledge and life experiences of older people are being recognized. In several of these educational programs, older adults share their knowledge and skills with other older adults. This exchange of knowledge and skills among older adults forms a peer learning network with distinct features and characteristics. Several questions come to mind when considering peer-mediated learning situations among older adults. What is the nature of the older adult who decides to assume an education role? What are the older adult's reasons for assuming an education role? What are his or her perceptions of the experience?

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A review of the literature on aging and education uncovered little research about the experiences of older adults as teachers. Descriptions of educational programs that have used or are using older adults as teachers of other older adults were abundant (Murphy and Flono, 1978; Bowles, 1976; Korim, 1974; Hirsch, 1978), but they failed to explore the older adults' motivations or their perceptions of the teaching experience. Research findings about the aging process did provide some insight into the concepts mentioned in the questions above, but they failed to provide an adequate theoretical framework for looking at the older adult teacher. The growing number of older adult teachers and the absence of empirical research and theoretical models which address the concerns previously mentioned posed a new area of study that required a fresh approach and perspective.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) advocate an alternative method for research situations that lack an adequate or suitable theoretical framework. Rather than setting up hypotheses to be tested (verification of theory), Glaser and Strauss propose generating hypotheses and theory from the data of social research. Utilizing this method eliminates the use of existing theories that have a "dubious fit and working capacity." This method was used for investigating the nature of the older adult teacher. Grounded theory became a means for in-depth exploration of the reasons older adults assume educating roles and their perceptions of the experience. In this research, the method provided insight into the following questions:

(1) What factors motivated the older adult to assume an educating role?

(2) What personal benefits did the older adult teacher perceive as a result of the experience? How did these perceptions relate to their initial decision to assume an educating role?

(3) What role did the peer-mediated learning aspect play in their perceptions of the experience?

A review of the literature revealed that older adults are increasingly recognized as resources, but these reports tended to provide program descriptions and did not attempt to present a theoretical model of the older adults' involvement (Academy for Educational Development, 1974). Also many reports of older adults in a teaching role focused on programs with an intergenerational mix. Examples included older adults tutoring young children in public school settings, or an older adult teaching 18 to 25 year-old college students (Murphy and Florio, 1978). These reports lacked an overall theoretical framework applicable to other similar situations.

Lifespan developmental theories identified tasks, needs, or life stages that a person must accomplish in order to successfully age, but they tended to be overly general for the research situation (Maslow, 1970; Havighurst, 1960; Erickson, 1963; Buhler, 1951; McClusky, 1974). Social

gerontological research on aging provided insight into the relationship between one's life style and social interaction in the later years, but it failed to develop an integrated theory addressing the motivational aspects inherent in pursuing different life experiences, as was the case in this study (Cumming and Henry, 1961; Havighurst, 1963; Palmore, 1968; Tobin and Neugarten, 1961; Atchley, 1976). Taken separately, these studies identified several potential factors that could explain an older adult's decision to become a teacher and his or her subsequent perceptions of the experience. They also provided a framework for analyzing an older adult's teaching experience in relation to other life experiences. Unfortunately, the motivational factors underlying an older adult's decision to undertake an activity, such as teaching, were absent from these theories of aging.

Finally, studies that investigated peer-mediated or self-help systems among older adults lacked the educational component that was of primary importance to this study (Hess, 1976; Waters, Fink and White, 1976; Becker and Zarit, 1978; DeCrow, 1978). The concept of self-help groups among older adults was central to this area of research, but existing theories which described the phenomenon needed to be expanded to include educational and learning stiuations.

METHODOLOGY

The generation of hypotheses and theories from the field data, rather than the verification of existing theory, required a change in emphasis and perspective. While verification of theory requires a deductive methodological process, grounded theory utilizes an inductive approach. The primary emphasis of grounded theory research centers on the generation of hypotheses and developing theories applicable to research areas that lack suitable theoretical frameworks.

In the process of theory building, the researcher gathers extensive field data that is used in identifying and generating conceptual categories relevant to the situation. As categories and their properties emerge from the data, they are compared to one another and to categories which develop from additional situations. Through this method of "comparative analysis," the researcher is able to integrate the categories and their properties into hypotheses, and eventually theory, which are grounded in the data.

Procedure

The data used for the generation of hypotheses about the nature of the older adult teacher and his or her motivations and perceptions of the experience were gathered during in-depth interviews with twenty-three older adult teachers. Each older adult interviewed had taught a course in a community-based learning center. The interviews were designed to elicit information that could be used as data for the inductive research process. Each interview consisted of open-ended questions that allowed for the exploration of the reasons for participating. Although the questions were direct in the sense that a specific area of research was involved, they were fairly unrestrained in order to promote the free generation of conceptual categories and properties. All of the interviews were audiotaped to eliminate the necessity of notetaking, which could detract from the interviewees' responses, and to facilitate the process of category comparison and the accurate recording of responses.

The interviews ranged in length from eighteen minutes to ninety-five minutes. The median length was thirty-two minutes, and the mean length was forty-one minutes. Each older adult teacher was initially contacted by a letter, which was followed by a telephone call to schedule an interview meeting. The interviews were conducted at a place convenient to the older adult, usually their home or the learning center office.

As mentioned earlier, the older adult teachers who were selected for interviews each taught a course at a learning center. At the three learning centers considered in this study, a total of 109 teachers were involved in facilitating course sessions between June, 1979 and July 1980. Of the 109 teachers, thirty-six were age 60 or older. A decision was made to restrict the interviewing to those older adult teachers who had conducted a course consisting of at least four sessions. A teaching experience of a shorter length would not have allowed for the generation of adequate interview data. Thirty-four older adults had taught courses of between four to eight sessions. The twenty-three teachers interviewed were selected using

a table of random numbers.

Interview questions were constructed that required in-depth responses from each older adult rather than simply "yes" or "no" answers. Each question was designed to elicit a response about a certain aspect of the older adult's teaching experience. In general, a majority of those older adult teachers interviewed provided lengthy responses about their reactions to the teaching experience. If the answer to a particular question was sketchy or limited, the interviewer encouraged further explanation and details. This interview process and format promoted the generation of numerous conceptual categories and properties.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Properties and Categories

The interview data yielded a wealth of information reflecting the older adults' decisions to teach and their perceptions of the experience. Comments from the interviews were treated as incidents and coded according to the properties indicated. These properties in turn precipitated categories representing conceptual elements. Next, relationships between the categories suggested potential hypotheses about the teachers' reasons for teaching and their perceptions about the experiences.

A summary of the categories and their properties follows. The properties should be considered as attributes of the more comprehensive categories.

CATEGORY	PROPERTIES
Education Training	Formal education training and teaching experience Informal experience No education training or teaching experience
Altruism	Sharing Nurturance
Peer Orientation	Peer sociality Age consciousness
Community Orientation	Community participation Community identification
Personal Satisfaction	Personal achievement Intrinsic enjoyment Social worth Fellowship Knowledge transmission
Self Actualization	Skill development Educational stimulation Personal growth
Educating Role	Helper Friend Expert Leader

Analysis of Properties and Categories

The conceptual categories and properties that emerged from the data accounted for all of the incidents that occurred. Some properties appeared more often than others, but the conceptual nature of the categories made accommodation of all the incidents possible.

The categories varied in the conceptual level they represented. For example, EDUCATION TRAINING was fairly straightforward, whereas PERSONAL SATISFACTION exemplified a larger concept and integrated a variety of properties. A few of the categories represented concepts identified in existing theories. Research by Atchley (1976) indicated that the social participation of older adults often correlated to similar levels of participation in their earlier years. As will be explained later, some of the concepts borrowed from existing theory were put in a new perspective to explain the phenomenon under study.

The inductive research process required that the theoretical concepts identified be closely integrated with the research situation from which the data emerged. An attempt was made to develop categories sensitive to the peer-mediated learning exchange. The categories listed above took into consideration the need to identify theoretical concepts that both interpreted the behaviors observed as well as remained true to the interview data.

The data were reviewed over and over again to ensure that the conceptual categories were developed to their fullest. With each category, diverse characteristics were integrated together under concepts that explained various aspects of the teaching experience. The mode of variation for the categories was distinguished by two types. Some of the theoretical concepts that emerged were qualitative in nature, while others were quantitative in nature. As the categories were compared with each other, the mode and extent of variation became important determinants in the theory building process. The categories formed a framework for the development of hypotheses.

Hypotheses

Only after making comparisons and establishing relationships among the categories did a framework for interpreting the behaviors emerge. The development of hypotheses was seen as a means for providing guidelines for future theory development about an older adult's decision to assume a teaching role. The hypotheses presented reflect the behaviors of only one sample of older adult teachers and remain tentative until verified in future studies with additonal samples.

The proposed hypotheses about an older adult's decisions to teach and his or her perceptions of the experience follow. These hypotheses are grounded in the data that emerged directly from the older adult teachers' responses to interview questions. The subjective nature of interview responses does not guarantee accuracy. For example, an older adult responding to a question about his or her involvement in community activities is not likely to provide a complete list of all activities

pursued but rather a synopsis of perceived key activities. These constraints must be taken into account when considering the proposed hypotheses. The study was also not extensive enough to generate hypotheses reflecting all the properties and categories. Only those hypotheses that readily emerged from the interview data were considered.

H-1: The willingness to share skills or knowledge with others will be perceived by older adult teachers as having no direct correlation to their formal education training and teaching experience.

H-2: The more extensive an older adult's reported history of community participation, the more likely he or she will be to assume a teaching role.

H-3: An older adult's decision to assume a teaching role based on altruism and peer orientation will be perceived as a reason to teach more often by those older adults with less education and teaching experience than by those with more.

H-4: The transmission of knowledge will be seen as a reason to teach more often by older adults with formal education training and teaching experience than by older adults with informal or no education training and teaching experience.

H-5: Fellowship and self-actualization will be perceived as benefits of the experience by more older adults teaching in an age-segregated setting than by those teaching in an age-integrated setting.

H-6: Older adults teaching in age-segregated settings will view their educating role as a helper or friend more often than those older adults teaching in other types of educational settings.

Analysis of Hypotheses

The proposed hypotheses vary in the level and extent of theoretical abstraction they represent. What became important was the identification of relationships among categories that would help organize the observation of behaviors occurring in future peer-mediated learning situations among older adults. Statements describing the experience could also have been listed, but they failed to contribute directly to the theory building process. For example, almost all the older adults had a positive perception of their teaching experience at the learning center. This finding describes one aspect of the experience, but cannot be written as a formal hypothesis, because it does not explain how behaviors will vary from one time to another or from one case to another. All of the proposed hypotheses establish a relationship that exists between variables, each of which represent different aspects of the teaching experience.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDED RESEARCH

The inductive research process does not stop with the generalization of hypotheses. As discussed in the previous chapter, the hypotheses form the framework onto which the theory as a whole rests. Because this study was limited to the investigation of one peer-mediated learning situation, full development of a theory about an older adult's reason for teaching and his or her perception of the experience was not possible. This section will highlight several recommendations for further research about the area and suggest applications of these findings.

Theoretical Sampling

During the process of generating hypotheses, the need for additional interview data from other sample groups became evident. Fully developed categories with a rich source of properties is obtained through the process of theoretical sampling. As categories begin to emerge and a framework for the theory evolves, additional data is collected according to need. The goal is to maximize differences among various groups in order to fully develop the emerging categories. Within a defined area of study, such as peer-mediated learning among older adults, the more sample groups utilized in a study, the richer and more comprehensive the data collection. Any theoretical concepts that emerge need to incorporate a wide range of properties. Through this process, a theory begins to develop that will be able to account for behaviors observed in a number of related situations.

Substantive and Formal Theory

Grounded theory research involved several steps in the generation of theory. After proposed hypotheses are formulated the theory itself is elaborated and refined. Glaser and Strauss (1967) identify two types of theory, substantive and formal. Substantive theory reflects work in a designated research area. Formal theory involves overriding conceptual areas that can include substantive theory. For example, this study was primarily concerned with the substantive area of older adult teaching. The formal theory areas would be motivation and perception.

Using the proposed hypotheses as a backdrop, theory should now be generated in both the substantive and formal theory areas. Once a substantive theory is established, formal theory can be developed. The motivational and perceptual factors of teaching involved in other substantive areas should be compared with the findings of this study. This expanded research process helps to eventually integrate an overriding formal theory.

Application of Grounded Theory

A benefit of grounded theory research not often found in other types of research is the close integration of the theory to the phenomenon being investigated. As has been discussed earlier, the theoretical concepts emerge directly from the data rather than the theory controlling

the data. The steps involved in inductive research help insure that the theory which develops will fit the research area. This in turn provides a solid framework to use in future studies. This study initiated the process of theory building to be continued in future studies. The close integration of data collection and theory generation developed findings that will be applicable to the research efforts of related studies.

In addition to researchers, practitioners working with older adults should find the results of this study usable and understandable. Again, the continuous process of comparing the theoretical categories that emerged with the data itself produced concepts that corresponded closely to the situation at hand. Those people working in this area of study should be able to react directly to the findings, as well as provide additional insights based on their observations.

Finally, the generation of categories and hypotheses using inductive research will allow the findings of this study to be extended to a variety of related areas of research. The concepts that emerged are theoretical, thereby remaining flexible for use in other situations. The generality of the findings will support additional theoretical sampling and application to other peer-mediated learning settings.

Although an initial step toward the generation of the theory explaining the older adult teaching experience has been completed, the process has really only begun. The theory formulation must continue to be fluid. When theory has evolved, it cannot remain static. The research process and theory itself must be able to accommodate new concepts as they emerge and are identified. As other situations involving peer-mediated learning among older adults are investigated, additional information will be generated that contributes to the theory building process. Although each older adult may state different reasons for deciding to assume an educating role and their perceptions of the experience will very, several overriding generalizations can be proposed. In an area of study where very little research literature exists, grounded theory research provides the necessary methodological design. For the purposes of this study, it encouraged the development of a fresh perspective on the older adult teaching experience.

Interview Questions:

1. Could you briefly describe some of the paid jobs, volunteer activities, work at home or in your business that you have done during your adult years?

2. How did you initially get involved as a teacher in the learning center?

3. Thinking back on your decision to teach (course title) why did you decide to do this?

4. What kind of teaching role did you take in the class? For example, were you an expert, leader, helper, friend, or some combination of these?

5. What personal benefits do you think you gained from the experience?

6. Did teaching the class cause you to feel differently about yourself? If so, in what way?

7. Have you ever been involved in any other experiences similar to this? If so, could you briefly describe them?

8. Would you accept a teaching role again? Why or why not?

9. Would you consider teaching other age groups? Why or why not?

10. Are there any other insights that you gained about yourself or about the teaching experience that you want to mention?

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